

Newsletter No. 6



THE FANYA GOTTESFELD HELLER CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN IN JUDAISM

From Our Director

Dear Friends,



Three years have passed since we last issued a newsletter from The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism and many of you have inquired about the reason for this intermission. The answer is mundane. The Center was subject to three years of budgetary cuts, which made it impossible for us to maintain the level of activities that we were used to. Certainly, any report during that period would

have been far less rich and exciting than in the past. We accommodated ourselves to the situation by encouraging several research projects, giving grants to students and supporting conferences and other activities at Bar-Ilan University that were relevant to the Center's interest in women and Judaism. Details of those activities appear in the following pages.



However, things began to pick up last year, which saw a revival of our activities in various areas. Particularly important was the very successful international conference that we held over two days, together with Bar-Ilan's Program for Gender Studies, on the topic

"Gender, Religion and Society". This event was organized by Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten, who deserves credit for much of its success. The newsletter contains a fuller description of the conference, which I'm sure that all readers will find of interest.

The conference was also important in another way. It provided evidence of the surge of academic interest in our field and of the reputation that the Center has established over the years. This, together with a generous injection of further funds by the Heller family, has invigorated our spirits and spurred us to attain further goals. Thus, it is with a feeling of energy and purpose that we have renewed our activities which will once again place the Center at the very crux of research and public activity.



As of the autumn of 2006, the Center will undergo two administrative changes. I am on sabbatical until the end of next summer, and Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten will be my replacement as Director. I am delighted with this choice. Elisheva is a wonderful colleague and active feminist, who teaches in the Gender Studies Program and in the Jewish History Department in Bar-Ilan. She is a well known scholar of medieval Jewish history and brings with her new energy and enthusiasm. We also have a new coordinator, Ms. Rivka Hindin. I'm sure that both Elisheva and Rivka will enjoy the full support of all the Center's members and friends, and I have every confidence that they will add further luster to the Center's good name and record.

Wishing them, and all of us, every success,

Tova
Prof. Tova Cohen

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International Conference: Gender Religion & Society

May 21-22 2006



In May, the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center in coordination with the Gender Studies Program sponsored a major international conference entitled "Gender, Religion and Society". The conference brought together dozens of speakers from the academic and religious world, from Israel as well as from the United States, Canada, India, England, Belgium, and France with the aim of addressing how gender and religion merge together in today's society. The aim of the conference was to analyze the dialogue between feminist theories and contemporary religions – their theologies, traditions, practices, and social institutions. Many speakers focused on the position of Jewish women in society.

The two-day conference consisted of sixteen sessions, with varying topics and agendas. Some well attended sessions included: State Law and Religious Norms, Legal Aspects of Marriage and Divorce, and Gender, Religion and Minority Cultures.

The conference, which was attended by hundreds of people including professors, students, and community leaders, featured prominent speakers from both Israel and abroad. Plenary speakers included Professor Rosemary Radford Ruether (Graduate Theological Union, Claremont Graduate University),



Professor Judith Plaskow (Manhattan College) and Professor Tova Hartman (Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

At a special dinner presentation, Hebrew University's Shmulik Bachar used various media to expand on his topic, "Approved in Islam, Denounced By the State: Polygamy in Egyptian Popular Cinema". The event had a very positive response. The conference also included a special art exhibit sponsored by the Lieber Center for Exhibits (Bar-Ilan University) prepared by Anat Chen, entitled "Women Praying on Their Own" and Rivkah Lubitch, entitled "Things Seen from Here Are Not Seen From There". Anat's exhibit featured women praying in artwork throughout the ages. Rivkah's eye-opening exhibit featured many photographs of the "men's sections" in synagogues, as seen from the "women's section".



"For me the best thing about the conference was the chance to see what is going on in gender through the country, and especially among younger scholars whose work was truly impressive", remarked Shira Wolosky, plenary speaker at the conference.

Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Graduate Research Awards

In 2005-2006, The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism awarded five Bar-Ilan graduate students, whose research focuses on women in Judaism, grants towards their studies. The following recipients received a scholarship:

Baruch Alster: (Ph.D candidate, Dept. of Bible) "Human Love and Its Relationship to Spiritual Love in Jewish Exegesis on the Song of Songs".

Fanny Hirshenberger: (Ph.D candidate, Dept. of Hebrew Literature) "Aspects of Moroccan Judeo-Arabic in Woman's Poetry".

Dana Keren Yaar: (Ph.D candidate, Dept. of Hebrew Literature) "Historiographical Stages in Hebrew Children's Literature (1880-1980): A Feminist and Postcolonial Reading".

Bella Layosh: (Ph.D candidate, Dept. of Education) "Changes in the Life of Haredi Women in the Areas of Studies, Work and Leisure and Their Meaning in Her Eyes".

Anat Sharbat: (Ph.D candidate, Dept. of Talmud) "The Concept of Sexuality in the World of the Sages; Exploring the Attitudes towards Sexuality in Rabbinic Literature Considering the Theological Aspects and Disputes of their Period".

We wish them much success in their studies and look forward to the results of their research.

New Program: Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Travel Grants



Natalie Goldberg



Ronit Ir-Shai



Elisheva Rosman-Stolman

The travel fund program is a new initiative to award recipients with funding so that they are able to attend international conferences and speak on their research topics. This new fund promotes Bar Ilan's reputation in the field of women in Judaism around the world.

The first recipients of the grant (2006) are **Dr. Natalie Goldberg** (Ph.D, 2005), **Dr. Ronit Ir-Shai** (Ph.D 2006), and **Dr. Elisheva Rosman-Stolman** (Ph.D, 2006). These three scholars will speak at the 38th annual AJS (Association of Jewish Studies) conference in San Deigo this December.

Natalie Goldberg's lecture will focus on Esther Gad, one of the first Jewish women in modern times to approach the issue of women's emancipation. Gad, born in Breslau in 1767, entered the public sphere as an accomplished writer, at a time when gender ideology inhibited women from writing and publishing.

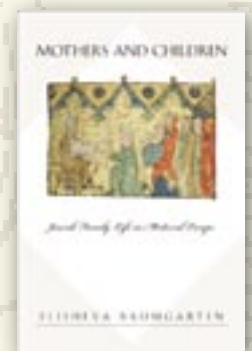
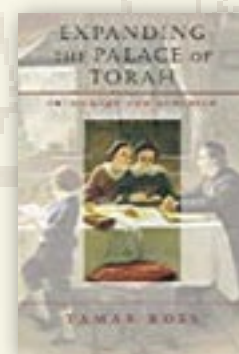
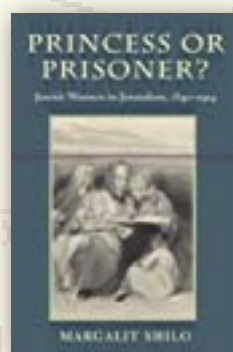
Ronit Ir-Shai will be speaking on "Fertility Gender and Halakhah". Ir-Shai discusses the importance of counting the feminist perspective when analyzing fertility issues in halakhic contexts, despite the fact that halakhah and feminist theory are often at odds.

Elisheva Rosman-Stolman will present her research entitled: "Empowering People?: The Gaza Disengagement as a Test Case for the Mediating Function in the Garinim Program of Women Midrashot". This paper discusses the response of women from midrashot to the orders that they were given regarding the Disengagement, and how the preparation they received from their study programs contributed to their attitudes and behaviors at that time.

National Jewish Book Awards 2006

We are especially proud that three books that were published with the help of funding from the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center were chosen as finalists in the category of Women's Studies as part of the National Jewish Book Award Competition. The books are: Tamar Ross, Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism, (UPNE, 2004); Margalit Shilo, Princess or Prisoner?: Jewish Women in Jerusalem, 1840-1914, (UPNE, 2002) and Elisheva Baumgarten, Mothers and Children. Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe, (Princeton, 2004).

The National Jewish Book Award is one of the oldest and most prestigious awards in the area of Jewish scholarly and popular literature. Founded in 1948 by the Jewish Book Council, the awards are meant to heighten the awareness of outstanding books of interest to the Jewish public. Congratulations to all the finalists!



From our New Director



It is with great pleasure that I assume the responsibility as head of the Center for this coming year. Since its foundation, the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism under the direction of Prof. Tova Cohen has furthered research in a variety of areas and brought together scholars,

students and the general community. Over the years that the Center has existed, the topics and issues that we have addressed have grown more and more central as questions of gender and Judaism have been at the forefront of scholarly debates and the worldwide Jewish community at large.

We take great pride in supporting both young and established scholars in these fields and we hope to continue to address central issues under discussion both within and outside of the academy and to encourage research and debate around these topics. We see it as our goal to promote activities and research on many levels – among undergraduate and graduate students, scholars, teachers and educators and the public at large. With the new and generous further funding from the Heller family, we hope to expand our activities over the next years.

We invite you to join us celebrating our achievements this past year in this newsletter, and hope to see you at our events in the near future.

Elisheva

Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten

Upcoming Events at the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center

Exciting new programs are being planned for the upcoming year, which promises to be an eventful one. Two conferences are scheduled, with the first planned for January 3, 2007 in honor of **Prof. Tamar Ross** who will be retiring. The conference will focus on three major issues in her research: The Mussar Movement, Rav Kook, and Jewish Theology and Feminism. Our second conference on **Gender and the Haredi World** will take place on June 10, 2007.

As in the past, we are looking forward to supporting young scholars in their endeavors. A new initiative will provide travel grants that will enable doctoral and postdoctoral students to attend conferences and speak abroad. Calls for applicants will go out by the end of December and the winners will be announced in the spring. As always, we continue to support senior scholars' publications on women and Judaism. We look forward to finding more ways to support Bar-Ilan faculty and students in their research.

We will resume the publication of our papers on "Women in Judaism" and will publish at least one paper this year, with the hopes of increasing our output in future years. In addition, we are working on updating our website.

We are looking forward to a stimulating and busy 2006-2007 academic year and hope that you will join us here for the different events!



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